

**PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES (NATURAL DISASTERS COMMITTEE)  
AMENDMENT BILL**

24 November 2011

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from 29 September 2011.)

**Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (10:34):** I would like to speak to the Parliamentary Committees (Natural Disasters Committee) Amendment Bill. I note this bill came about because of the actions of the member for Davenport when looking at having a standing committee into bushfires. I certainly think we should have a committee inquiring into natural disasters and bushfires, and I can understand the member for Davenport's interest in this area knowing the locality of his electorate. It is certainly something that is vitally important for all South Australians. We are seeing things change regarding what is needed to be in place as far as what happens on so-called catastrophic fire days, especially in relation to schools.

There was quite a bit of confusion last fire season when this policy was first put in place for catastrophic fire days and it caused a great deal of confusion, not just in the city but also in the regions. It can cause a great deal of angst as to whether or not school buses run. A lot of school buses have a start time of seven in the morning, if not earlier, so there need to be firm policies as to what procedures need to be in place about shutting down a school and where the refuge of last resort is for education facilities. I can certainly remember my school days, and they seem a long time ago.

**Mr Williams:** With good reason!

**Mr PEDERICK:** Not that long ago, member for MacKillop.

*Mr Griffiths interjecting:*

**Mr PEDERICK:** Just a couple of years ago; thank you, member for Goyder. The procedure at our little school, Coomandook Area School, was to head out to the school oval. That was a pretty good procedure: you are out in the open, you are on a green area and you are pretty safe. The guidelines being put in place now—the rules, so to speak—are that you need to have an assembly area that is serviced by toilet facilities. In the first instance, some would think that is quite a good idea, but in light of some of the procedures that are in place now with regard to my old school, Coomandook Area School, where my children go—

**Mr Pengilly:** Did you get expelled?

**Mr PEDERICK:** No; not at all—the mustering point is one of the central classrooms in the school. I have a problem with that as far as access for fire trucks to get in there. A lot of these school buildings are timber buildings, so likely to light up. I can understand the bit about being near toilets, but toilets might be your last thought if you are trying to escape a blazing inferno that could engulf classrooms.

I certainly think there is a lot more work to do, especially regarding fire safety and what procedures are put in place. I would like to think an open area is far safer, and I know that my area—and I know I am speaking mainly about near where I live

at Coomandook—is fairly low risk, but these things really come to the fore when you come to heavily timbered areas, for example, throughout the Adelaide Hills and a lot of the side streets and back streets and that kind of thing.

I am certainly well aware of reports in the newspapers and in the media several years ago about the possibility of losing 300 people in the Hills if we have something like Ash Wednesday 1983 again. I still believe that could be the case because there are a lot of areas where the streets are not very wide, obviously a lot of hills to negotiate, and for people who are not aware of the local area, a lot of places where people could get lost and trapped.

I acknowledge that in the Country Fire Service we now do what is called a burn-over drill every year, where you are either inside the CFS truck or on the back. With our newer trucks all the crew can be in the cabin. There are blinds that can come down on the inside and there are sprinklers around the outside of the cab and around the edge of the truck, and you can certainly get monitors going to propel water around the track as a refuge of last resort.

I think a lot of people will remember those terrible images of several years ago—I think it was in Victoria—of crews that had got caught out in fire trucks and had paid the ultimate sacrifice for their volunteer efforts to protect the community. It was a very sad day for firefighting authorities in that state and for the people involved and their families. So I think there is certainly room for a standing committee in regard to natural disasters. You only know how bad things can get if you are involved in something like this, and I have been involved in the CFS for many years and have fought plenty of fires.

Thankfully some of the guidelines for putting the firefighting aeroplanes in the air have relaxed so that they can go up far sooner to protect property, not just buildings and other built assets, so that fires can be put out far earlier. We noted the debacle that happened at the start of the terrible Wangary fires on the Eyre Peninsula, where a local contractor wanted to put his plane up to fight the fires but was not given approval. To this day—and he can say it for himself—I bet he wished that he had gone against the rules and done that. However, I am pleased that things have moved forward, as I understand it, with regard to getting aircraft in the air. I know that we can get the Elvis Heli Crane—

**The Hon. C.C. Fox:** Elvis?

**Mr PEDERICK:** Yes. Elvis re-enters the building.

**The Hon. C.C. Fox:** I've got the shoes.

**Mr PEDERICK:** Oh, very nice shoes, Minister for Transport Services. Blue suede? You've hit the money.

*Members interjecting:*

**Mr PEDERICK:** Yes, the minister on the other side and other members are trying to distract me, Madam Speaker. I seek your protection. All I am saying is that it is a deadly serious affair. When you hear first-hand accounts of people watching their grandchildren die in a fire, like I heard about the Wangary fire, it really hits home. It is quite emotional just to listen to those stories, and to know that there is someone in that situation, who has witnessed these terrible things.

We do need to make sure that the right education programs are put in for the citizens of this state, we need to make sure the right protocols are in place the citizens of this state, and we need to make sure that our emergency services personnel, not just the CFS and MFS, have the right legislation and the right protocols to operate under.

I have been made aware of terrible decisions that have been made with regard to fires, where people have held off back-burning scrub because they were frightened of what the environmental agencies would do to them, but they would have saved a world of pain for communities in the Lameroo region if they had back-burned one day in Ngarkat, because the fire was going to come out at 90 km/h—which it did in the end anyway.

So some of these people in the environmental sector really need to get their heads screwed on; instead of replanting dead trees at Keith get out into there into the real world and have a look at what actually happens. I certainly support the establishment of a committee on natural disasters. It is not just fires; it can be flood or a whole range of other issues that can happen, and I think we should have a standing committee in this place. I fully support it.